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Journal

• INSTITUTE BOOKLETS: 23

SCIENCE, DEMOCRACY AND RELIGION

By

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
INSTITUTE OF CULTURE

CALCUTTA

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THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
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Science, Democracy, and Religion is the text of a speech delivered by Swami Ranganathananda, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and formerly Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, at the Institute on 28 August 1954. It formed part of *Eternal Values for a Changing Society*, a volume of the Swami's writings and speeches published by Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Calcutta 14, and is now being separately reproduced in our Institute Booklets series.

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SCIENCE, DEMOCRACY, AND RELIGION

THE SUBJECT before me is a vast one, and each of the three components—science, democracy, and religion—is a vast topic in itself, and can keep us absorbed for hours; but I have proposed to tie them together and treat them as a single theme, in order to focus your attention on these great forces that are working in our country today to reshape it in a fundamental way.

The Forces of Science and Democracy

In the modern world, the forces generated by science and democracy have been operating in a variety of ways to transform human life. Already a vast amount of transformation has taken place in some parts, and the impact is being felt in other parts as well. Our country has been feeling the effect of these forces in a general way for the past half a century; but since our attainment of independence, we are being thrown, with increasing momen-

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tum, year by year, into the very vortex of these forces. The country today has to reckon with them. The age demands of our citizens an understanding of these forces, an acceptance of them, and an intelligent assimilation of their values, so that India may forge a new character and a new destiny for herself. A discussion of a subject such as this cannot therefore be of mere academic interest to us, but is fruitful of lasting individual and collective welfare.

Compared to other countries, there is something special and, if I may say so, significant in the interaction and outcome of these two forces in the Indian context. For that context is constituted by a deep and abiding religious consciousness which derives its strength from a rational and comprehensive philosophy. Since historic times, religion has been the most vital force moulding our individual and collective life; it is so even today. It has given us strength and vitality to stand the vicissitudes of our long history, resilience and adaptability to adjust to changing times, and an assimilative power to syn-

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thesize the new with the old, making for continuity in the context of progress. The problem of India in the modern age is the assimilation of the forces of science and democracy which are being grafted on to her spiritual tree. The success of this experiment depends upon two factors : the vitality of the spiritual sap running in the tree and its hospitality to the new forces contained in the grafts.

These new forces took their birth in Europe and America. The development of science and technology revolutionized the lives of people of those countries, releasing powerful social forces of which the idea of democracy is the most outstanding and pervasive. The intellectual force of science and the social force of democracy have had devastating effects on the thought and life of the western man. These new forces could not be assimilated to the western religious consciousness and tradition which did not prove a hospitable soil to them. The result is a schism in the mind of the western man, indicated by ever recurrent conflicts, faith in conflict with reason, the spirit at logger-

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heads with matter, and man in opposition to the universe.

India Faces a New Challenge

India's handling of these forces, the method and manner of her approach as much as the success of her endeavours, is therefore of more than national significance.

Whether we like it or not, science and its fruits are disturbing our slumber of ages; the 'good old days' are going out fast, never to return. The pattern of our economy, the web of our social and family relationships, the mood of our millions, and even the values of our lives are all being thrown into the melting-pot of the modern transition. With the intensification of the pace of industrialization, the centuries-old staticity of our feudal society is being profoundly disturbed; social mobility is fast breaking down caste and other old forms of social relationships and, faster still, the social sanctions behind them. Virtues that sustained a static age are found to be utterly inade-

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quate to the demands of a dynamic society. Everywhere we witness the crumbling down of old values, old edifices, and old social and economic groupings. And this is just the beginning of our industrialization; we can well envisage, from the example of the experience of western countries in the last century, what disturbing effects it is going to have on the mind and face of our old society. It is good for us to visualize the consequences of the root-and-branch revolution that is in prospect in all aspects of our national life, and mobilize our national wisdom to meet its challenge intelligently and effectively.

A period of profound transition is not the time for complacency. India has experienced stormy periods in her long history. She had responded successfully to all such challenges on the strength of her tenacious loyalty to fundamental spiritual values, which she consequently placed at the foundation of her national culture. It is this faith in spiritual values, which has been tested in good and evil fortune, that is being challenged and menaced by the most powerful storm of the modern tran-

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sition. All the previous challenges were mild in comparison, being only fractional, whereas this one is total. Is there not something in our age-old heritage which has the vitality to welcome these new forces—the intellectual force of science and the social force of democracy—and assimilate their values into the national heritage, so that it may emerge stronger and richer than before ?

Science as Knowledge and Power

Science is characterized by a keen spirit of inquiry and a deep passion for truth. Under this supreme stimulus, and disciplined in its rigorous method, science has enabled the human mind in recent centuries to unravel secret after secret from nature and increase enormously man's knowledge of the world in which he lives. In its onward march, science as knowledge has disturbed the wayside calm of untested beliefs and comfortable dogmas. Therein lies its primary explosive character for the mental life of mankind. A secondary explosive character appeared when science as knowledge flowed into science as power.

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Two hundred years of technological advance has ushered in a new era and a new civilization in human history. Technology has placed a vast amount of power in the hands of man, power derived from the control of the forces of nature. Part of this power has found beneficial expression in effecting the material well-being of man and the external solidarity of the world. The rest of it has functioned without large aims and purposes to thwart human evolution and even imperil the human race. In the modern world, to quote Bertrand Russell (*Impact of Science on Society*, p. 123), 'We are in the middle of a race between human skill as to means and human folly as to ends' resulting in strife, insecurity, and sorrow. And to quote him again, 'Unless men increase in wisdom as much as in knowledge, increase of knowledge will be increase of sorrow' (*ibid*).

Science: Its Use and Abuse

Technological advance has also disturbed the comparative static human situation of

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centuries; and out of the intensified social mobility generated by it has evolved a new ratio of social forces, which has given birth to the theory and practice of democracy. Democracy is a powerful social force in the modern world. The common people, the world over, who were creatures of socio-political circumstances created by the will-to-power of a few, are becoming transformed through democracy into individuals and ends in themselves and into repositories of socio-political power. The co-ordination, adjustment, and chastening of this will-to-power, originating in mllions of ego-centres, is the problem posed by democracy today.

The world is being reshaped by science and democracy. This reshaping is throwing up a new serious problem before the world—the problem of man himself; he is unhappy, unstable, and insecure. Vast knowledge and power given by science and democracy have inflated his ego and increased his power for evil more than for good. Efficiency as to means and folly as to ends have made him the only possible destroyer of his new civilization. The two

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world wars have tended to substitute a large question-mark in the path of his destiny in place of the melioristic hopes raised by scientific humanism and naturalistic ethics of the earlier decades. The great fruits of science are being used for purposes constructive and destructive. They are running parallel to each other, and the fear that the destructive may overreach the constructive has become a constant spectre to the modern man. Two significant questions, therefore, remain to be *adequately* answered by every right-thinking person. They are: (1) Has science given anything of fundamental value to humanity? (2) So far as the individual is concerned, can it produce the right climate of peace and happiness for his total welfare? We say *adequately* because vague and incomplete answers to these questions are already in the field. The apparently unquestionable fact that science is never to blame—because it is neutral so far as its application or utilization is concerned—does not bring the problem nearer solution. There is seen to be more insecurity in a scientific world than

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in a pre-scientific one. Yet man needs the services of science very much, but not without safeguards against its possible abuses.

Democracy Enhances Human Dignity

Closely allied to, and dependent on, science and technology is that other great force of the modern world, democracy. Democracy—political, economic, and social—has been developing haltingly in the West since the nineteenth century; it has been developing and spreading all over the world since the twentieth century. The aspiration of every modern social or national unit is to evolve itself into a democracy of the most desirable excellence. It is a magic word in modern society. It expresses and includes in a special way the highest aspirations of freedom-loving citizens in the colonial and dependent territories of our plundered planet. True democracy consists in enhancing the dignity of the individual and ennobling the aspirations of the group. The persistent demand of the common man for being recognized and valued as a full and free citizen of his motherland finds its strongest endorsement

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in the ideal and practice of democracy. Political democracy, with universal adult franchise as its chief source of power, serves to give back in a large measure to each of the toiling millions his or her share of individuality and dignity.

In India we have, in our own small but effective way, accepted and brought into practice this allround value of democracy by declaring our State a Sovereign Democratic Republic. The idea of democratic citizen stirs in the hearts of our downtrodden millions much confidence and hope, and, putting faith in their sound political sense and social wisdom, we have extended franchise to millions on a scale unprecedented in world history. Yet, much remains to be done in order to rouse the millions to self-conscious activity. A vast and varied programme of national education is under way, endorsing Jefferson's dictum that education holds the key to the stability of a democratic order. The nation is getting galvanized through the community projects and national extension services, the Bhūdān and Śramadān, and diverse other movements.

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Thus, in an initial and experimental manner, we have accepted and dealt with this great world-moving force of man—on-the-march, which is democracy. And democracy in India means vast millions on the move. We are fully aware that such experiment in democracy is sure to bring about revolutionary changes in our individual and social life. In fact, we know well that great changes are taking place even now. Yet, unafraid of the future, India nurses democracy as a thing of supreme value to man not only in the national, but also in the international context. Accordingly, her new constitution lays stress on the individual's essential humanity, irrespective of racial, communal, or caste affiliations.

Democracy in India

Democracy has come to stay. How does India propose to assimilate this value to her hoary cultural heritage—a value which she has largely adopted following western modes of experience? Will democracy get a new creative expression in the Indian context? Or, will she express only a pale

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imitation of its western edition and eventually make a mess of it ? These are questions of profound import.

What do people generally uderstand by the term 'democracy' ? Maybe, the ballot box, adult franchise, government by an elected majority party, a cabinet responsible to an elected parliament, etc. Apart from these accepted implications of democratic theory and practice, it is necessary that democracy should have a content of universal value which is something more than the merely political, social, or national. It is obvious that that value is the ethical and spiritual content. Without that content our democracy will be nothing more than a mere carbon copy of what obtains in the democratic countries of the West. In several of these countries the pendulum of state set-up has oscillated between its two extremes of democracy and totalitarianism. And in all of them it has oscillated between the tensions of peace and the tensions of war. Social forces, developed and released by technology and democracy, have got to be chastened and guided, if they are not to oscillate between

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cold war and hot war. How are we going to avoid such a situation in India? Can we in India tame these turbulent forces and use them for national and international human welfare?

Man starts rebuilding himself and his society with the forces available to him at the time. Thus have grown and developed human culture and civilization in the various parts of the world. What is happening today? There is an inordinate amount of force and power, scientific and political, in the hands of man—hands often itching for a fight or for mischief. The problem of nations is how best to handle this force and this power in such a way as not to result in corruption in the wielders, and in confusion or harm to the people at large.

India thus is facing today, with other nations, this problem of handling the power and forces of science and democracy. Some of the questions that arise in this context are: Who are the persons that are fitted to handle this power; what shall be the method of handling this power; and how shall the original and

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essential aim of ensuring the happiness of humanity at large be steadily kept in view?

India's Spirit not Opposed to Science

In the background of these agitating questions lies the great spiritual heritage of India. Those who are acquainted with its vitality hold the hope that India can yet show the world how to understand, assimilate, and express human values which form the theme of democracy everywhere. India's spirituality can enable Indians and the peoples of the world to digest the formidable forces that are being generated and placed in man's hands today. The spiritual meaning of democratic living and fulfilment, as taught by India's ancient and modern seers—in other words, the religion of the spiritual oneness of humanity—has to be revived and reactivated in men's thinking and day to day living, and its powerful influence brought to bear on these new and ever newer forms of scientific and social power, thereby giving

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them a higher direction and a loftier spiritual and human purpose.

This is the central message of religion. It is a message which requires to be specially emphasized in the world in which we are living today. The word 'religion' carries to some at least of the modern world a bit of bad odour. It is unfortunate. It is due to the fact that religion became identified with untested beliefs and dogmas. And these got shattered in the progress of scientific inquiry. In the history of Europe, religion has often functioned as an 'enemy' of science. But that experience is not universal or invariable ; it is a story with its backgroud in the West only and not in India. Our entire mental make-up, proceeding from our long cultural experience, is not only not hostile, but is very sympathetic and hospitable to the scientific spirit. In *The Discovery of India* (pp. 626-27), our Prime Minister, Sri Jawaharlal Nehru, has expressed the view that science, which has much leeway to make in India compared to western countries, is bound to make increasing advances here in the future because of the hospital-

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ity of the Indian national heritage to science. Says he:

'Science has dominated the Western world and everyone there pays tribute to it, and yet the West is still far from having developed the real temper of science. It has still to bring the spirit and the flesh into creative harmony. In India in many obvious ways we have a greater distance to travel. And yet there may be fewer major obstructions on our way, for the essential basis of Indian thought for ages past, though not its later manifestations, fits in with the scientific temper and approach, as well as with internationalism. It is based on a fearless search for truth, on the solidarity of man, even on the divinity of everything living, and on the free and co-operative development of the individual and the species, ever to greater freedom and higher stages of human growth.'

Science will have no opposition from philosophy or religion in India as it had in the West. Our national thought is quite helpful and conducive to the growth of science. This is absolutely true, because we have a temper that always honours and welcomes knowledge of any kind.

Knowledge and Wisdom

In the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (I. 1.4-5), it is proclaimed that there are two types of knowledge: one the supreme, *parā*, and the

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other the ordinary, relative *aparā*. All the knowledge of the time—science, literature, and arts, including the knowledge contained in the sacred Vedas—was relegated by the Upaniṣad to the category of the oridinary or *aparā* knowledge. That alone is *parā* or supreme knowledge which helps to destory spiritual blindness and reveal the ever present spiritual reality behind man and nature. And this is the theme and passion of religion as understood in India.

In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (vii. 1. 1-3) there is the arresting story of Nārada going to a great philosopher, by name Sanatkumāra, for thorough instruction in the knowledge of Truth. 'Please teach me, O Master', solicits Nārada. The teacher replies, 'Tell me what you already know; then I shall teach you further'. Nārada replies, 'I know what is in the sacred books, the Vedas; I know also many sciences like astronomy etc.', and he gives quite a long list of subjects. Then he concludes, 'And yet I am unhappy; there is gnawing sorrow; I am not able to get peace of mind', and adds: 'I

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have heard from great teachers like you that only the *Ātmavit*, the knower of the Self, can get rid of sorrow. So take me across the ocean of sorrow.' To this earnest question of a great seeker, who had much knowledge but little peace and who was in search of that higher knowledge which puts an end to all doubts and sorrows, the great teacher, Sanatkumāra, replies: 'You have learned all the Vedas, the sciences, and the arts; but they are merely strings of names, words, mere transformations of sound; you must seek for the meaning behind all sounds, behind even all thought, the supreme truth of Being.' And the whole chapter is an exposition of this great idea, the search for not merely the meaning of words, but the *meaning* of meaning itself.

This is philosophy, *parā vidyā*, the basis of all forms of knowledge, *sarva-vidyā-pratiṣṭhā*, the knowledge of That by which all else is known, and as such synthetic and comprehensive. The Upaniṣads contain an impressive record of great minds wrestling with the problems of life and existence and arriving at the truth of the unity of Being through perfect self-control, con-

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centration, and meditation. Nārada as well as modern man illustrates Bertrand Russell's statement that if there is increase in knowledge without a corresponding increase in wisdom, such increase of knowledge is only an increase of sorrow. Nārada had the urge to go beyond knowledge to wisdom, and he pursued that urge with courage and determination. Many others like him had done the same, both men and women. Indian philosophy and culture bear the impress of their passion for truth, comprehensive understanding, and unifying and pacifying love for all mankind. Modern man is just beginning to feel the need to go beyond knowledge to wisdom.

The Way of Wisdom

But what is this wisdom? In our country, we have been taught that the nature of wisdom consists in the synthesis of all knowledge, in the awareness of That 'by knowing which all else becomes known' (*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, I. 1. 3). It is that total *Weltanschauung* which includes and

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transcends all relative knowledge contained in science, art, and religion, leading to universality of outlook and unfettered sympathy. The attainment of wisdom is no quick process; because it involves a struggle to change human nature itself through the practice of self-control and self-transcendence (*indriya-saṁyama* and *tyāga*). As an unanchored boat driven by the wind and tossed by the waves gets lost in the turbulent waters, even so, this human personality, when allowed to be carried away by the turbulent senses, and by the mind that follows in their wake, comes face to face with grief and sorrow and spiritual disaster (*Gītā*, II. 67). The whole of modern civilization is but a palpable reminder to man of this warning that life suffers shipwreck, if there is nothing to check the outward tendencies of the mind and the senses, if it is not anchored in the inner Self, the fountain of all strength, resources, and joy. This is the great idea that the *Bhagavad-Gītā* expounds with force and lucidity.

Swami Vivekananda taught that the purpose of religion is to transform man the

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brute into man the God. This is not the sphere of science and politics. These do not constitute wisdom and the good life, but only provide the conditions thereof. Says Swami Vivekananda (*Complete Works*, Vol. V, Eighth Edition, pp. 192-93):

> 'The basis of all systems, social or political, rests upon the goodness of men. No nation is great or good because Parliament enacts this or that, but because its men are great and good. . . . Religion goes to the root of the matter. If it is right, all is right. . . . One must admit that law, government, politics are phases not final in any way. There is a goal beyond them where law is not needed. . . . All great Masters teach the same thing. Christ saw that the basis is not law, that morality and purity are the only strength.'

If this message is properly understood, man will be able to grasp the meaning of science and democracy, make the forces they generate his servants, and utilize them to enhance life and build a steady character. And because our country has held on to this message of religion in good and evil fortune, and borne witness to the undying reality in man and nature, she is able to rebuild herself repeatedly whenever there is a sagging of her spirits and a lowering of her ideals.

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SCHISM IN THE MIND OF THE WEST

Europe and America have for religion Christianity, which has been a great spiritual force in the history of the world. But in recent centuries it has not been exercising very high influence on the western mind, because most people in the West find themselves subject to the vagaries of a divided personality. Their loyalty is largely to science; but their religious beliefs do not find support from modern science which grew to stature at the cost of religion. Unwilling to disbelieve, but also unable to believe, many have become just nominally religious, but essentially thiswordly, dazzled by the logic and visible achievements of science and technology. There is, unlike in India, no unifying philosophy to mediate between faith and reason, faith and faith, and faith and life. Bereft of the sustenance of such a philosophy, religion in the West more and more tended to be removed from lived experience, to get confounded with dogmas and conformities, and reduced itself to an intellectual and spiritual sterility. This alone

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explains its failure to welcome, chasten, and transform the intellectual force of democracy.

The Vedāntic Synthesis

That science is a fundamental force and that it does have a great message for all men is understood in India, no less than elsewhere. Human welfare partly depends upon the knowledge and control of the human environment, natural and social. The Vedānta has always given an honoured place to science, as also to politics, in this sphere of human welfare. But the Vedānta has also taught India that these two do not constitute the whole scope of human welfare. Man is more than a political animal ; he is also more than an intellectual being. He has depths and heights which cannot be compassed in a purely materialistic or positivistic philosophy. Indian thought recognizes no compartments or divisions in the human personality leading to mutual exclusion and hostility in human aspirations and values, such as pleasure and profit, science and art, morality and religion.

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The unity of man emphasizes the synthesis of his interests. While accepting the great importance of science and politics for man, the Vedānta evaluates them in terms of his total needs and aspirations. Man seeks things of utility for the sake of things without utility. Science through technology can give and has given man things of utility in abundance; politics can give him things of utility of another order, a stable social order, the venue of his life's experiments. But neither science nor politics can give man peace or happiness, joy or a sense of fulfilment. These non-utilitarian values proceed from religion and morality. Science and politics can create only conditions for their emergence, but cannot create them directly. Without this spiritual direction, the forces generated by science and politics nourish the lower self of man and become sources of sorrow and discord, division and instability for man and society. A knowledge which leads to the increase of sorrow is not knowledge, but ignorance, the offspring of spiritual blindness. It is spiritual awareness alone that transforms all knowledge into wisdom, and into

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forms of peace and happiness, love and unity.

Spirituality Ensures Stability

The transformation of the world which science and politics seek is powerless to ensure human welfare without the transformation of human nature itself, which religion seeks through a discipline of the whole personality. It is only such spiritually disciplined individuals and groups that can ensure for humanity at large the values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, of liberty, fraternity, and equality. The peace and happiness of man and the stability and ordered progress of civilizations depend entirely upon the intensification of the spiritual awareness of humanity. With this spiritual awareness for foundation, the structure of civilization raised by science and democracy becomes strong and steady; without it, it sways in periodic crises to topple down eventually. Without the inspiration of religion, civilization shall ever remain an unstable structure.

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That is the verdict of history. And India has held on to this faith in the primacy of the spiritual over every other value from the hoary past of her history. Science or politics, art or social graces are but means to advance the spiritual life of man. Guided by the synthetic philosophy of the Vedānta, the civilization of India has not rejected or excluded any tested human value, but has synthesized them all under the hegemony of the spiritual. Other social structures, tall and powerful, have decayed and fallen, being built on sand—on materialism and worldliness; but this structure, vast and lofty, has endured, being built on rock—on spirituality and unworldliness. India has more truly heeded the warning of Jesus, of gaining the world and losing the soul, than any other nation; and she has proved in her history that the world belongs to the unworldly, and the meek shall inherit the earth.

The dictum of the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (VI. 19) that not through technological advances, but through the knowledge of God alone shall mankind attain peace and happiness has great relevance for the

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modern world (*yadā carmavadākāśaṁ veṣṭayiṣyanti mānavāḥ, tadā devam avijñāya duḥkhasyānto bhaviṣyati*). That idea has been the leaven in Indian civilization; a little of that leaven can leaven the whole bread of civilization today. The way India transformed her knowledge and experience into wisdom with the help of this leaven of spirituality has a deep meaning for modern India herself, now in the grip of a revolutionary transition, and also for the modern world, which is in the grip of fear and sorrow and despair. In prosperity and adversity, in joy and sorrow, India has clung to God. She has acquired a spirituality which has stood the test of time and circumstance. Religion is not an opinion with her, but a deep national conviction. That is the sanction behind her voice which is gentle, yet unmistakable in its utterance, and hope-inspiring.

Vedānta Seeks Universal Welfare

Besides the integral unity of man and his interests, the Vedānta also proclaims the unity and solidarity of all existence. The objective of the Vedānta is the happi-

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ness and welfare of man ; not man as divided into sects, creeds, and classes, but man as man wherever he may be found. Based on this unitary and universal view of man upheld in her philosophy, religion in India taught that man, in the course of his development, in the course of his self-expression, generates various forces, physical or mental, social or political, and that the development of these forces needs to be matched by a corresponding development of his inner spiritual forces, which alone can provide the factors of stability to an evolving personality or social system. If science and politics make for progress and development in the natural and social environment, there must be spirituality to make man adequate to this development. When vast powers are placed in the hands of man, there must be ampler powers generated in his heart through moral and spiritual discipline of the whole personality. Man loses life's battle when he fails to find the centre of gravity of his personality within himself, but seeks for it in everything outside of himself. This enrichment of the inner life, this deepening

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of the roots to match the widening of the branches, this strengthening of the stakes along with the lengthening of the ropes, is the unique contribution of religion to civilization. Steady wisdom and stable character are its watch-words. Hence its message is eternal and perennial.

This wisdom or this spirituality is embedded in the great Vedānta, the philosophy which breathes the spirit of fearlessness, harmony, and universality. The advance of science or the development of socio-political thought holds no fear for a religion deriving its strength from the Vedānta. Under its hegemony, science, politics, and religion will function in harmony and co-operation to ensure total human welfare everywhere. Its proclaimed objective is this universal human welfare, not national or racial, nor segmentary or fractional. Freedom, physical, intellectual, and spiritual, is the watchword of the Vedānta, says Swami Vivekananda (*Complete Works,* Vol. III, Ninth Edition, p. 238). It seeks not only other-worldly, but also this-worldly welfare, not only *niḥśreyasa,* but also *abhyudaya.*

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'I salute this great philosophy of unity,' sings the great Gauḍapāda, an Indian teacher of the eighth century, 'which proclaims the solidarity of all existence, which seeks the happiness and welfare of all beings, and which is free from all strife and contradiction' (*Māṇḍūkya-kārikā*, IV. 2).

VIVEKANANDA'S PRACTICAL VEDĀNTA

It is in the light of this Vedānta which sees the unity of the Self and the non-Self, that Swami Vivekananda approached our pressing national and international problems. The freshness and vigour of his approach are derived from his vision of unity and synthesis. In this context alone can we understand his passionate exhortation to the nation to concentrate its energies for some decades on the material and social advancement of the people. He pleaded for a 'toned down' materialism to suit our immediate requirements, for effecting the uplift of India's sunken millions. 'I do not believe in a God or religion', says he, 'which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's

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mouth' (*Complete Works,* Vol. V, Eighth Edition, p. 50).

He taught that the only way God can come to a hungry man is in the form of a morsel of bread. He pleaded for materialism in the service of spirituality; material improvement, he held, is the condition precedent for India's spiritual and moral advancement; one is the means and the other the end, and he found no conflict between them. With convincing logic and charm, he taught India and the West that spirituality suffers as much from lack of wealth as from too much of it; and he found the spirituality of Afro-Asian countries suffering from the former and that of the western countries from the latter. It is not to religion, in the limited sense of the word, that he asked the nation to turn to seek ways and means to work out its material and social welfare, but to science and democracy. Yet, he proclaimed that religion will ever remain the national passion in India; the search for the meaning of life lies beyond the horizon of man's material desires and struggles. The urge to know the soul, to know God, to pierce

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the mystery that veils nature constitutes the religious impulse in man. Indian culture bears the deep impress of this impulse in its multitudinous manifestations. There need be no fear that material and political advancement may choke up this distinctive national theme; on the contrary, the energy of this impulse, according to Swami Vivekananda, will only find higher and higher expressions in the life of our people, when our centuries-old economic and social maladies become progressively cured through the applications of science and democracy. Religion, in the limited sense of *mukti* (liberation) or *niḥśreyasa*, has a direct message for only a limited number of people in any given civilization; it involves a capacity to gaze into far distant horizons of being. The immense majority can see only a limited range of the horizon, the horizon of material and social welfare, *abhyudaya*. It is Swami Vivekananda's supreme glory that he re-enunciated the all-embracing spirituality of Vedānta and demonstrated the end and aim of all life's endeavours and struggles to consist in freedom—freedom from all bondages, actual

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and possible, physical, intellectual, and spiritual. This all-embracing touch comes out prominently in his definition of religion (*Complete Works,* Vol. I, Eleventh Edition, p. 257):

'Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this . . . and be free. This is the whole of religion.'

The conquest of external nature leading to liberation from the physical, social, and intellectual bondages of the soul is the contribution of science and politics to the growth of the soul. They thus become transformed into forms of spirituality; they become departments of his 'Practical Vedānta'. Says Swamiji (Sister Nivedita, *Introduction* to *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda,* Vol. I, p. xiv):

'Art, science, and religion are but three different ways of expressing a single truth. But in order to understand this, we must have the theory of Advaita (philosophy of non-duality).'

India's Opportunity and Privilege

'In the two words equilibrium and synthesis, Vivekananda's constructive genius may be summed up. He embraced all the paths of the spirit: the

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four Yogas in their entirety, renunciation and service, art and science, religion and action from the most spiritual to the most practical. Each of the ways that he taught had its own limits, but he himself had been through them all, and embraced them all. As in a quadriga, he held the reins of all four ways of truth, and he travelled towards Unity among them all simultaneously. He was the personification of the harmony of all human energy.'

—writes Romain Rolland in *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel* (p. 283, Fourth Impression).

In the strength of this equilibrium and synthesis taught and exemplified by Swami Vivekananda, India is in a unique position to demonstrate to herself and to the world the complementary character of the forces of science, democracy, and religion in the service of total human welfare. The world needs this synthesis very badly today. Never before in the history of humanity has there been such a spectacle of a plethora of material and social advantages outside and fear and instability within.

Says Sorokin in *The Reconstruction of Humanity* (Prologue):

'Bleeding from war wounds, and frightened by the atomic Frankensteins of destruction, humanity is desperately looking for a way out of the death-

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trap. It craves life instead of inglorious death. It wants peace in place of war. It is hungry for love in lieu of hate. It aspires for order to replace disorder. It dreams of a better humanity, of greater wisdom, of a finer cultural mantle for its body than the bloody rags of its robot civilisation. Having foolishly manœuvred itself into a death-trap, and facing the inexorable problem, "to be or not to be", it is forced to pursue, more desperately than ever before, its eternal quest for survival and immortality.'

Swami Vivekananda wanted that India should not repeat the mistakes of the West, but learn valuable lessons from the experiences of those nations. After our independence, we have seriously taken in hand the economic and social advancement of the country through the Five-Year Plans. We have chosen to industrialize the country undeterred by fears generated by the experience of the West. We have set in motion a country-wide enthusiasm for science and built and equipped a chain of national laboratories. And we have set our society in the direction of democracy, political, economic, and social. These are bold steps for an old nation to take—this pouring of strong, new wine into this old bottle; but it has been done without the least tremor or fear, because of the dis-

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covery of the youthful vitality of India and the release of her undying spiritual energies by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

Freedom and Equality: A Spiritual Urge

The message of democracy is the message of freedom and equality. It is essentially a spiritual message, though it finds expression in political or social garbs. As such, the establishment of freedom and equality can never be done on the basis of a mere political or economic view of man, or by mere political or economic methods. The urge for freedom and equality is a spiritual urge; equality is never a physical, intellectual, economic, or social fact; inequality in all these fields is the glaring fact. An appeal to equality cannot proceed or get a response from the economic man or the political man. Self-aggrandizement and exploitation are the impulses of man at those levels. If man had no deeper levels than these, all talk of equality would have been a cry of despair.

Western democracy is suffering from this

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surface view of man and the despair it engenders owing to its shifting sandy foundation. That is why, in spite of centuries of democracy and the abundance of formal freedom and equality, the West is still far away from real freedom and equality. Undue emphasis on material values leads to breakneck competition and struggle, and causes the evaporation of the content of freedom and equality. These two values can be derived only from the spiritual nature of man, the spark of the Divine in him, which is the inalienable and invariable part of him, and which constitutes his real Self. This is the Ātman of the Vedānta, the unchanging reality behind man's personality, unaffected by all changing social evaluations of high and low, rich and poor, man and woman, learned and ignorant. Here we reach the rock-bottom of experience which provides the only secure foundation for raising the edifice of equality and freedom. Freedom of man derives from this, his spiritual nature; equality is the recognition of this divine thread of unity behind all apparent differences of personality.

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The Divine in Man: The Basis for Democracy

Thus the Vedāntic ideal of the divinity and solidarity of man provides the only stable foundation for the theory and practice of democracy. Swami Vivekananda exhorted us to build our democracy on this solid foundation. The parable of Jesus about the wise man who built his house on rock and the foolish man who built his house on sand is significant here. Western democratic structure is built on the concept of the sense-bound man; it has its seasonal disturbances, each succeeding one more serious than the preceding. To quote the words of Jesus: 'And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it' (*Matthew*, vii. 27); for it was founded on sand. And if we but copy the same, what profit are we or the world going to derive? If, on the contrary, we infuse our democracy with the spiritual idealism of our country and treat every man, in the words of Kant, not as a means but at an end in itself, we shall

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be creating a social order where man will become the focus and source of all value, and which will breathe the spirit of harmony and universality. Swami Vivekananda found the highest exposition of this sentiment in the following two verses of the *Gītā* (v. 19, xiii. 28):

'Relative existence has been conquered by them, in this very life, whose mind rests in evenness, since God is even in all and without imperfection: therefore such are said to be living in God.

'Seeing the same God equally present in every being, one does not injure the Self by the Self, and so goes to the highest goal.'

True democracy is inconsistent with a narrow self-sufficient nationalism or sectarianism; it must tend to reach out to the universal. Breaking the barriers of caste and creed, race and sex, high and low, the democratic idea, deriving its sustenance from the divinity in man, marches on, without obstruction, to the realization of the universal. Swami Vivekananda desired India to uphold this ideal of the universal in her religion and politics, science, and literature. He desired India to strive for the evolution of a Vedāntic civilization where science and politics would be utilized to lead man to higher and higher levels

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of self-expression; not merely desired it, but he also demonstrated that India, among all the nations, had the requisite historically acquired capacity to make that contribution to world civilization.

Conclusion

Swami Vivekananda's thoughts on this subject are of invaluable help for our nation today. It imparts courage and clarity, hope and enthusiasm. And we shall need these qualities in ever-increasing measure as years go by and as the nation becomes fully self-aware and mobile.

Long before we embarked on an independent career of nation-building, at the close of the nineteenth century, we were fortunate to get the guidance of a Vivekananda, the like of which no other nation has or had. In him has religion shaken hands with science in a common adventure for the deliverance of the human race in India and elsewhere. And whatever we may do today in India in this field will carry a vital significance for all humanity. Our problems are vast and varied. But we have an abundance of spiritual wealth,

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hardly utilized. It is true to say that in the world of ideals we are starving in the sight of plenty. We have need to develop practical efficiency to translate visions into realities. This will be the gift to us of true scientific discipline and social vision. Both are derivable from our national heritage and genius. Our democracy must become a live social awareness and discipline, instead of remaining a mere political technique of State. The aim of all the three—religion, science, and democracy—is the creation of a pattern of human happiness and general welfare. Their synthesis alone can ensure for man everywhere that inner enrichment and poise in the context of external prosperity and progress, which makes for a sense of creative living and fulfilment. While science and democracy deal with 'man the known', religion deals with 'man the unknown'. A complete integral civilization cannot afford to sacrifice either in the interests of the other. And India is called upon to show the way of achieving this synthesis for the good of herself and the world.

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